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READY, SET TO BLOOM! CAMPAIGN PLAN

PLANTING SEEDS OF AWARENESS IN PREPARATION FOR A HARVEST OF INCREASED FINANCIAL SUPPORT

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Project Pitch

The project I propose falls under the umbrella of strategic communications. It is a public relations/integrated marketing campaign for the McMinnville Education Foundation, which plays an important part in the education of McMinnville school students—but few people and businesses know that. The goal of the campaign will be to bring awareness to the community about MEF and the mini grants it awards to educators, which cover the cost of enriching educational materials, programs and activities not funded by the school district. The campaign is needed because the organization depends on donations for those grants. Raising awareness in the community about its work will lead to increased financial support for the organization. My motivation for choosing this project is two-fold. First, I believe that financing enrichment activities for children, particularly those from low to middle income families that cannot afford the extra educational trips and experiences that those with more money can afford, is a worthwhile project. Second, I see the project for MEF as a fantastic way to gain real life experience in public relations and fundraising that will better prepare me for work with nonprofit organizations in the future.

Situation Analysis

Mission and Goals

The mission of McMinnville Education Foundation is to “expand the range of educational opportunities available to students and to encourage excellence, innovation and creativity in McMinnville School District 40.”

The impetus for creating the foundation in 1998 was that, like other districts in the state, the McMinnville School District was having to cut back its budget. The founders of MEF thought that having a foundation was a way to fill in some of the gaps that resulted in areas like art and science. They wanted an organization that would cover all the schools, not just elementary, middle or high schools.

To support its mission, MEF has two goals: to raise awareness of what it is doing and raise funds for mini grants and other educational programs, such as the Artist in Residence Program, Science Experiences and Battle of the Books. Year after year, its purpose has been to supplement and enrich the education of McMinnville school students at all levels, from kindergarten through graduation. The foundation does this by providing mini grants of up to \$1,000 to teachers. Since 2000, the organization has awarded more than \$500,000 in mini grants to teachers, the organization’s website says. Each grant serves the group’s mission by making “teacher-innovated ideas” a reality.

For more than 23 years the MEF board has stayed true to its mission by coordinating with the school district and providing funds for enriching educational materials and experiences that fall outside the district’s budget. MEF’s mission has become more important over time as they have watched the district have to stop funding things it did in the past due to lack of funds.

The foundation receives funding from a variety of sources for its mini grants and other programs. During the 2020/2021 year, contributions from the community amounted to approximately \$30,000, board member Carol McCulley said in an email. A little over half of those donations were generated by an end of the year fundraising letter; online PayPal donations; and teacher's own payroll deductions, which amounted to about \$2,000, she said. It also received a \$500 grant and \$1,100 from memorials and raised approximately \$10,400 by selling donated cases of wine and holding an outdoor Chalk the Walk event, McCulley said. The organization also has a \$650,000 endowment that it takes about 5% out of each year, she said.

The foundation's mini grants were a godsend to teachers when Covid-19 forced the district to shutter its doors. The grants provided a way for many teachers to get needed learning supplies into the hands of children studying remotely at home. This shows the organization's determination and willingness to help provide an excellent education to all students even if it looks a little different some years.

External Environment

"McMinnville is a community that makes the welfare and educational needs of its children a priority," the About page on the MEF website says. The city has many parks and playgrounds as well as a community center and city-owned swimming pool. In recent years, residents have approved bonds to provide funding for the school district to remodel schools and upgrade technology across the district. The town's priority of supporting all things related to children is also seen in the way it gives to other local nonprofits that serve children and their families.

However, Covid-19 hit the community hard from March 2020 to March 2022. Businesses in the McMinnville area, especially smaller businesses that had to close for a time while the larger

big-box stores were allowed to remain open, were also affected by the pandemic. Fewer sales meant locally owned businesses could not donate as much money to nonprofits as they had in the past.

In addition, most of the community's yearly public events were cancelled due to limitations on the size of gatherings, and people were unhappy with the mask mandates and being required to get vaccinated to keep their jobs. Covid fatigue set in, and nonprofits were unable to conduct business as usual to bring a ray of hope to the community. This impacted MEF, perhaps more so than other organizations, because even before the pandemic began, board members were trying to come up with a replacement for a highly successful yearly fashion show that they were no longer able to put on. While the organization was able to raise money in 2021 with its Mixed Sale of Wine in December and two outdoor fundraising events, including Chalk the Walk in August and Runtoberfest in October, it could not host its special yearly mini grant reception that it used to invite recipients, other teachers, principals and donors to. Even though the reception is not a fundraiser it is a very important part of how MEF operates, because it is one way it connects with and strengthens its relationship with donors, which can affect whether and/or how much they donate in the future. That, combined with not having the fashion show, likely contributed to a notable drop in donations compared to 2019.

Now that the worst of the pandemic seems to have passed, large fundraising events are starting to be held again, such as Yamhill County Gospel Rescue Mission's Night for the Mission on March 5, which Yamhill County's News-Register reported was attended by more than 200 people. About \$55,000 was raised at the event, the mission's director Kaye Sawyer told the newspaper. The McMinnville Food & Wine Classic also made a return this year, and other organizations are in the planning process for their own events as well.

However, while such public events are still popular, giving habits have changed since MEF was founded over 20 years ago. There is a new generation of civic-minded people whose way of life is much different than that of their parents and grandparents. Busy young mothers and fathers, with sporting events and other activities taking up their time, do not attend fundraisers in the large numbers their older counterparts did in the past—and due to the recent pandemic, those advanced in years may still avoid larger gatherings for the time being. Many of the younger generation do not read the newspaper; they get their news online. And when it comes to giving, they might pass up a flyer, but they will pause to read an engaging social media post about what an organization is doing while they scroll through their newsfeed.

Organization Analysis

The main characteristic that sets MEF apart from other educational nonprofits is that its mini grants are awarded to teachers in all fields of study, unlike other organizations with a narrow focus on just music, art, band, sports, STEM or another area. This means the foundation helps provide funding for all different types of programs and learning opportunities that adults remember having as kids that school districts can no longer fund, board member Jen Davies explained in a Zoom meeting. Those include a district art program and science experiences on and off site for all elementary school students. Both are run by the district but backed financially by MEF, she said.

Because of the broad reach that MEF has in enriching students' education in all areas of study, it might seem that it is not in competition with other nonprofits that raise money for school activities. Nevertheless, it really does compete for donations with all other nonprofits in McMinnville in that donors interested in helping children must make a choice about where they donate their money. They not only have to choose from among educational nonprofits, but also

from other organizations that have a slightly different mission including A Family Place, which supports at-risk families; the See Ya Later Foundation, which in the past held free and low-cost music and sports camps and a fishing derby for children; and Campfire Columbia, which has replaced Kids on the Block but still has the same focus on before and after-school activities. Like MEF, those organizations struggled to raise money during the pandemic.

But in addition to not being able to hold normal fundraising events, the foundation went through the pandemic without a strong online presence, which reduced its visibility in the community and put them at a disadvantage compared to other nonprofits in McMinnville, such as See Ya Later Foundation and A Family Place, which both have updated websites and stay connected with donors and potential donors by regularly posting on social media. On Facebook alone, See Ya Later has 4,067 followers and A Family Place has 2,320 followers. In comparison, as several board members noted, MEF's website is outdated as is its Facebook page, which has just 881 followers and only posts to promote fundraising events, leaving large gaps of time between its communications with donors and potential donors.

Regardless, MEF has many other wonderful strengths that serve it well, such as its "working board" who have in the past been willing to put in long hours when that is what it takes to have a successful fundraising event. And there is every reason to believe that they will continue to generously give of their time, because they believe strongly in MEF's mission.

The board is resourceful and can obtain discounted printing at local businesses. It also has some partner businesses, including Nector Graphics, owned by Andrea LaRue, who has designed items for MEF fundraisers in the past. Another internal resource is a younger board member, Jen Davies, who is active in Memorial Elementary School's PTA and is knowledgeable about social media.

However, while the board has successfully drawn in younger members, it is by and large made up of committed volunteers who have given their money and time to the nonprofit for many years, some since the organization's founding, and they may not be as familiar with the important ways social media can be used to raise awareness and funds in 2022 or how to use them. And that could be a threat to MEF's continued fundraising success if there are not enough volunteers to maintain a standing online campaign that includes posting stories to raise awareness about its work, in addition to promoting events, so it can regularly connect with current and potential donors. However, it is completely doable and not a lot of work. All it would take is for a couple of board members to volunteer to help out. They could be provided with an easy guide to follow with steps and ideas for online stories.

Opportunity Statement

While indoor and outdoor events, as well as flyers and brochures placed strategically in businesses and attorney's lobbies, all still play an important role in fundraising, and continuing to use them is important, you have an opportunity to become more relevant to the "phone first" people who communicate on their phones via social media and get even their local news online.

Giving the organization's website a facelift and promoting MEF's mission in earnest through social media will fit your description of what your Linfield Senior Project handout said you would like to do, which is "make the McMinnville Education Foundation a household name and clearly define the difference between what [you] provide versus what the district provides in order to increase donations to support MEF-funded programs." A constant flow of information online will not only bring awareness and draw new donors but will strengthen your relationship with current donors as you share stories about how mini grants, funded by their

donations, are enriching McMinnville students' education. In addition, an online campaign will draw in donations that are not solely reliant on in-person events.

Most people agree that the world as we once knew it has changed. Developing and implementing an online communications plan can provide a way to draw in new supporters and keep current ones abreast of the foundation's work no matter what the future holds.

Target Audience

The target audience for an awareness and fundraising campaign includes parents of children in the McMinnville School District of all ages and income levels; grandparents and other older folks; and businesspeople, particularly young professionals who are civic minded and concerned about the quality of education children receive in McMinnville.

Because these people genuinely care about the community, they will be interested in learning about MEF. Once they become aware of what your organization is doing to help kids—and what MEF needs from the community—they will step up to help meet that need and continue to do so as they are updated through stories about how grant money is being used.

An opinion leader who we might enlist to help with the campaign is superintendent Debbie Brocket, whom the MEF board has said is supportive of its work. Overall, people in the community seem happy with the new superintendent. She has reached out continually to parents since she took the helm at the district, asking for their feedback and sending out a bulletin regularly to keep them updated about what is happening in the district. People are eager to learn more about her, so they might be more inclined to listen to her as a spokesperson for MEF.

Campaign Plan

Introduction

As reported in the Situation Analysis, McMinnville Education Foundation would like to become a household name. An awareness campaign will help your organization make measurable progress toward that end. As individuals and businesses become aware of what your organization is doing to help McMinnville students—and what MEF needs from those in the community—they will step up to help meet that need and continue to do so as they are regularly updated about how their donations are being used.

Goal

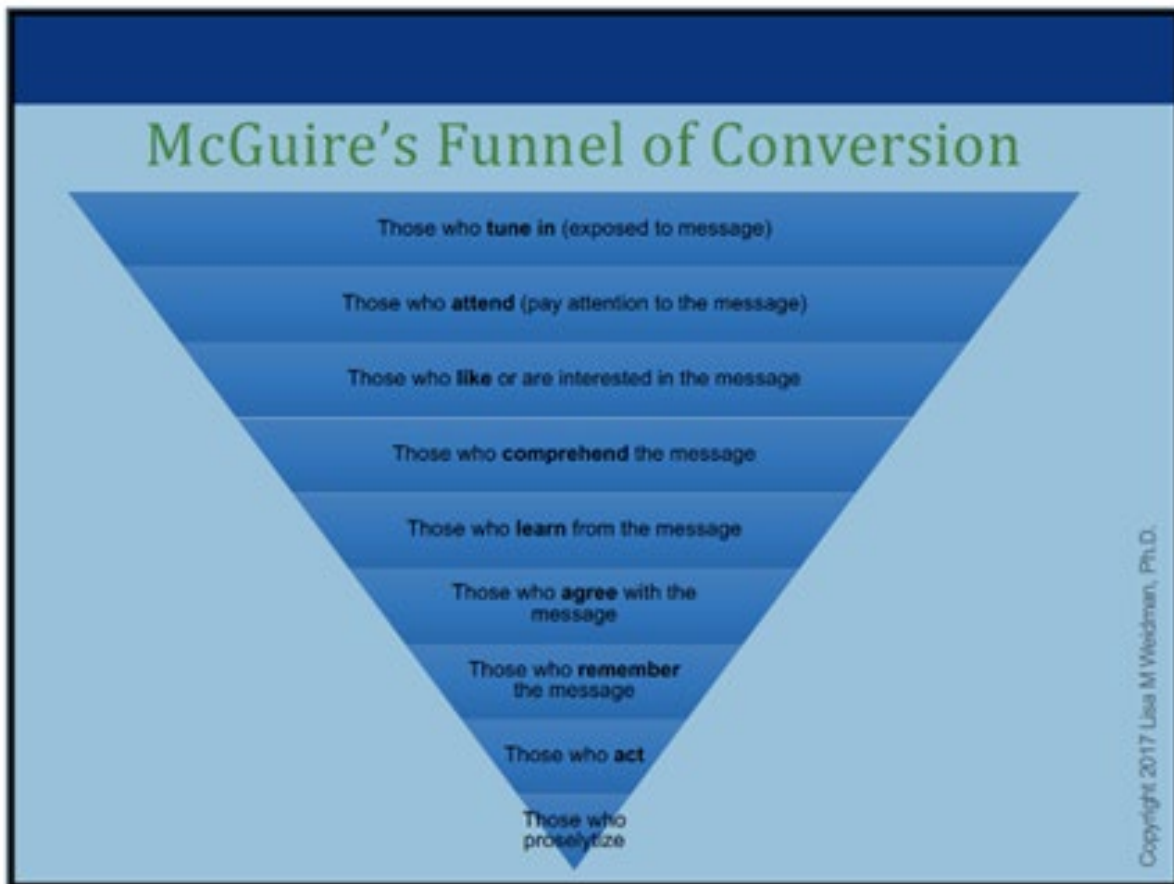
The goal of the Ready, Set to Bloom! campaign is to raise awareness and interest in what MEF does, in order to make measurable progress toward making MEF a household name in McMinnville, which will over the long-term result in new donors.

The target audience are those identified in the Situation Analysis, which includes parents of children in the McMinnville School District of all ages and income levels; grandparents and other older people; and businesspeople, particularly young professionals who are civic minded and concerned about the quality of education children receive in McMinnville.

Objective

The campaign's objective is to bring awareness to at least 180 individuals over a six-month period about what MEF is doing to “encourage excellence, innovation and creativity” in McMinnville Education District 40 by providing funding for enriching educational opportunities beyond what the school district's budget provides.

The theory used to structure the campaign is McGuire's Funnel of Conversion, which explains the progression that takes place when a person is presented with a message that is new to them. Dr. Lisa Weidman, Journalism and Media Studies professor at Linfield University, demonstrates it effectively in her image of an inverted pyramid with nine levels. Starting at the broad end of the figure and descending downward, the funnel identifies those who “*tune in, attend, like, comprehend, learn, agree, remember, act and proselytize* (Weidman, 2017).” As you can see in the chart below, fewer and fewer people move towards conversion as the funnel narrows.



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While the focus of this campaign is awareness, not conversion, McGuire's funnel is a useful tool in understanding how the following strategies and their tactics lay the foundation needed to increase financial support for MEF's programs.

Strategy A

The campaign has two strategies. The first is to use shared media, which is information and content posted on social media to raise awareness of MEF. Blogs, Twitter and Facebook are three examples of shared media. It differs from traditional print media in that it provides a way to have ongoing two-way conversations with an audience. Information can be easily shared, followed, liked or commented on by others. It is an inexpensive, and often free, way to present information and build relationships with people. I will train you to use it to tell about your organization's work and present information that is related to education in some way and of interest to your audience. Doing the latter presents an organization as a type of expert in its field and increases the likelihood of gaining followers online (Scott, 2021).

Tactic 1: Blog

The first tactic to raise awareness is a blog, which MEF will start posting to in May. I recommend posting the first and third week of every month. Each post will highlight a program or activity funded in part or full by MEF. Information for these posts will come from Grant Application Forms, Grant Completion Forms and other types of feedback, such as conversations with teachers and others who used MEF monies. Each blogpost will include at least one photo. If there is not one available, then the writer will use copyright free stock photos from sources like Pixabay, UnSplash and Pexels.

Posting on a consistent ongoing basis will be vital to successfully raising awareness. You will not get the response you want without doing so. To make it easier, there will be a signup sheet provided for board members to choose which months of the year they would like to write a post and what area or subject they want to cover. A list of helpful tips for writing online will be available as well.

Gaining followers for a blog takes time. Like starting up a new business, it will take patience to keep at it the first year. To help things along, board members, teachers and other volunteers passionate about MEF's mission will be encouraged to invite people to check out the new blog.

The blog's effectiveness will be measured by the number of people who subscribe to it from the launching of the campaign in mid-May to mid-November and by viewing the number of visitors to the site during the same periods of time using Google Analytics, which can easily be added to your WordPress website. It is free and user friendly.

Tactic 2: Social Media

The second shared media tactic involves using Facebook and Twitter. We will begin by giving your Facebook page a fresh look by updating the cover photo and adding more information to the About section. At that time, I will delete any duplicate posts, so visitors to the page will not get bored and leave if they go back and scroll through previous posts.

The campaign calls for creating a Twitter account for your organization because, like Facebook, it is used widely by those in your target audience. We will use the same header there as we used on Facebook to make your brand recognizable across the two platforms.

Starting in May, MEF will post at least one time each week on both pages. On weeks when there is a new blogpost, the posts will be a link to it with a very brief teaser or comment. There

will be a list of resources and suggestions that writers can refer to for other post ideas, along with the tips for writing online content created for blogposts. Again, like the blog posts, posting regularly is key to getting the response you want.

The social media pages and posts will be promoted several ways. Those that link to a blogpost, will be “sponsored” at least one week each month. “Sponsoring” a post or “promoting” one on Twitter is an inexpensive way to advertise, and Facebook allows you to define the audience you want to see your posts, making it money well spent. In addition, board members and other volunteers can ask their family and friends to visit one of the social media pages to see what MEF is about. We will ask those who already follow the page to do the same. Another way to promote the pages is by having the author of a blog post send a link to it to their family and friends via Facebook, Twitter or even email.

To evaluate how effective Twitter and Facebook are in raising awareness, you will note the number of new followers and likes your pages get from mid-May through mid-November. Looking at Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics, which both track engagement, will supply additional helpful information.

Strategy B

The second strategy is to use owned media to raise awareness among those who are unfamiliar with what MEF does and do not use shared media. It is also a second way to reach those who do. Owned media are self-published materials that an organization or business has complete control over from creation to distribution, unlike earned media, where a writer decides what to write and an editor decides what to print. Newsletters, brochures, flyers for events and other print materials are owned media.

Tactic 3 Flyer

The first type of owned media in the campaign is a tiny flyer, a little smaller than a quarter sheet of printer paper, which will be used from mid-May through mid-August. Volunteers will attach it to a small packet of wildflower seeds. The flyer will say something along the lines of this: “Like a field of wildflowers, each child has a beauty all their own. To learn how you can help kids bloom, follow McMinnville Education Foundation on Facebook and Twitter.” Along with planting instructions, the brochure will have a QR code that readers can scan to visit your social media pages. The little flyer will also say something like: “*MEF is a 503c nonprofit providing funds for enriching educational opportunities for McMinnville students beyond what the school district provides.” It will also have a list of programs and activities that you help fund.

The seed packets and attached flyers will be placed in baskets with a “Take one” sign on the front. Board members—and volunteers who are knowledgeable about MEF—will drop baskets off at businesses and offices that have financially or otherwise supported the organization in the past. Other places to leave baskets are at businesses owned by young professionals, places that provide financial services or attorney’s offices that give legal advice to those creating wills and living trusts. Other drop-off points include gyms, doctor’s offices, community buildings, such as the community center, library and senior center.

Those delivering the baskets will let the receiver know that MEF will post a list on its social media pages telling people where they can pick up a packet. They will also point out that taking a basket is a wonderful way to let people know that the business/organization is community minded and cares about McMinnville’s children.

At the first of July, those who dropped off baskets will go back and see if they need to be refilled. Then when they pick up the baskets in mid-August, they will ask to leave a rack of brochures, which is the second owned media tactic.

Awareness can be hard to measure. So, MEF will determine the effectiveness of this tactic by noting the number of seed packets that were taken from mid-May to mid-August. For the sake of evaluation, you can assume that everyone who took a packet read the flyer.

While not part of this campaign, MEF might consider doing something similar again in November and December but using a small ornament, like a miniature wrapped gift ornament, attached to a flyer encouraging people to consider a financial gift to MEF when they do their end of the year giving.

Tactic 4 Brochure

The next tactic, which will be used from mid-August to mid-November is an “evergreen” brochure. Evergreen means a piece of media only contains content that will not become outdated over time. The brochure will have a QR code in it that people can quickly scan with their phones that will take them directly to your website and/or social media pages.

The brochure will be chock full of information about what you do, why you do it, what it looks like, ways community members can help and a list of corporate donors. While perusing the brochure, readers will learn about the labels that MEF puts in books it pays for. That way, when people see one, they will recognize your name. It will also contain information about all the other things your organization helps fund including mini grants, Battle of the Books, Artist-in-Residence and Science Experiences. There will be a mention of living trusts, wills and corporate sponsorship opportunities as well.

Board members or other volunteers who are knowledgeable about MEF will deliver brochures, along with a display rack, to businesses and organizations in town. Suggestions for drop-off points are the same as those for the baskets with the seed packets and flyers. I recommend that twelve volunteers each take responsibility for six drop-off sites.

After school begins in the fall, board members, as well as other representatives familiar with your organization and its work, will reach out to parents in the district by going to a PTA meeting at each school. There, they will distribute brochures to those in attendance and answer any questions. The representative will also ask about social media pages that are related to the school. That way MEF can follow them and link to them when they present information that might be of interest to your audience.

It is imperative to keep an accurate count of where and how many brochures are distributed for two reasons. The first is so you can go back and refill the racks and the second is so you will know how many were taken. That number is important since you will use it to measure the tactic's effectiveness by assuming that each person who took a brochure read it.

Tactic 5 Survey

The last tactic for the campaign is a two-question survey that will be included in print and online forms for events. The first question is: How did you hear about this event? A list of options will follow that participants can choose from to answer the question. The second question is: Did you know that McMinnville Education Foundation is on Facebook and Twitter?" This will not only reveal where people hear about your events, but it will make people aware of your social media pages.

This tactic is not designed to raise awareness, since it is assumed that those signing up for an event are already aware of your organization. However, the tactic is included in the campaign because it will be helpful for you to note how people hear about your events, so you know how to tailor your marketing strategy accordingly in the future.

Evaluation

The overall effectiveness of the Ready, Set to Bloom! campaign will be determined by adding together the findings that resulted from evaluating each tactic's efficacy. If, over the course of six months, 180 or more people and/or businesses in your target audience engaged with one of the tactics used in the campaign, it will be determined that the campaign's objective has been met and that the organization has made measurable progress toward its goal to make MEF a household name.

Follow Up

After the end of the campaign, board members and the volunteers will return to all the places where they left brochures and/or baskets to ask business owners and managers if they have any questions about MEF. At that time, they will talk to them about the opportunity to become a corporate sponsor.

The brochures will need to be refilled on an ongoing basis. You will also need to continue to post on the blog and your social media pages on a regular basis to keep growing awareness about MEF

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